

# Hepatitis C Patient Resource Sheet

## What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (a type of germ). The hepatitis C virus is found in the blood of people who have hepatitis C infection.

## How is hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C is spread by contact with infected blood. People **most** at risk are those who have:

- ✦ Had a blood transfusion or an organ transplant before July, 1992;
- ✦ Used needles to inject drugs, even once; or
- ✦ Ever been on long-term kidney dialysis.

The hepatitis C virus can also be spread through sexual contact, but this does not happen as easily as the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

The hepatitis C virus is **not** spread by casual contact like hugging, sneezing, coughing, or sharing food and drinks. You **cannot** get hepatitis C by donating blood.

## How serious is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is serious for some people, but not for others. Most people who get hepatitis C will carry the virus for the rest of their life. Some of these people will develop liver damage and feel very sick. Others may feel healthy for many years after being diagnosed.

After many years, the hepatitis C virus can cause cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and/or liver cancer in some people. While most people will not develop liver failure or cancer, there is no way of knowing who will or will not have these problems. When someone has been diagnosed with hepatitis C, alcohol can be very harmful to their liver. People with hepatitis C need to reduce or eliminate even small amounts of alcohol from their lives.

## Who is at risk of getting hepatitis C?

People are at risk of getting hepatitis C if they have:

- ✦ Had a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July, 1992;
- ✦ Used needles to inject drugs, even once;
- ✦ Ever been on long-term kidney dialysis;
- ✦ Received blood clotting factors before 1987;
- ✦ Had unprotected sex with a person known to have hepatitis C; or
- ✦ Had sex with multiple partners without using a condom.

## Is there a treatment for hepatitis C?

Yes. A drug called interferon can be used to treat hepatitis C. It is usually used in combination with other drugs, such as Ribavirin. People diagnosed with hepatitis C should talk to their health care provider to see if treatment can help.

# Hepatitis C Patient Resource Sheet

## How can hepatitis C be prevented?

Prevent the spread of hepatitis C:

- ✦ Avoid any contact with blood.
- ✦ Never share drug injection equipment (including needles, cottons, cookers, or straws).
- ✦ Use a latex condom every time you have sex.
- ✦ Only get tattoos or body piercings from licensed places.
- ✦ If you have hepatitis C, don't share razors, toothbrushes, or any other items that may have blood on them.
- ✦ If you have hepatitis C, don't donate blood, sperm, or organs.
- ✦ If you are a health care worker, follow standard (universal) precautions to avoid contact with blood.

*Remember, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.*

## What about other kinds of hepatitis?

There are several different kinds of hepatitis viruses. If you have one type, you can still get any of the others.

*Hepatitis A* is spread by feces (stool) through close personal contact or contaminated food and water. Even a very small amount of feces can carry this virus. There is a vaccine to help prevent hepatitis A infection.

*Hepatitis B* is spread through blood and body fluids, like semen. There is a vaccine to help prevent hepatitis B infection.

Both hepatitis A and B can harm your liver. If you have hepatitis C ask your health care provider about getting vaccinated for hepatitis A and B to protect your liver.

## To learn more about hepatitis C:

- ✦ Ask a health care provider;
- ✦ Contact your local health department; or
- ✦ Contact:
  - The Massachusetts Department of Public Health:  
888-443-HepC (888-443-4372)  
[www.masshepc.org](http://www.masshepc.org)
  - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:  
888-4HEP-CDC (888-443-7232)  
[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis)
  - The American Liver Foundation:  
888-4HEP-USA (888-443-7872)  
[www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)